



Environmental Overview Study (EOS) Preface

Rapid growth and development along the North Front Range of Colorado has created the need for a transportation planning process that is responsive to future transportation needs, development pressures, and the natural and built environment. To successfully address this need, the Colorado Department of Transportation (CDOT) developed and initiated the Environmental Overview Study (EOS) process. The EOS process is structured to provide a basis for long-term roadway improvements and to provide support for local planning decisions. The intended outcome of the process is the preservation of a corridor for future transportation improvements. Through this process, future improvements to the state highway system can be integrated with other local and regional transportation plans (RTP) resulting in a proactive transportation vision within the North Front Range.

The EOS process is intended to be open and interactive, with all interested local and regional agencies encouraged to actively participate. In the EOS process, public input is solicited to develop an understanding of the important community values relating to both the development of alternatives and the selection of a recommended alternative. Data collection, technical analysis, and public and agency input are all collectively used in this collaborative process to understand the nature and magnitude of the transportation issues within a corridor and then develop realistic solutions that can be carried forward for further analysis.

While the sections of an EOS are generally consistent with National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) documentation, an EOS is not a replacement for an environmental decision document. The EOS process is designed to serve primarily as a transportation planning process with an environmental overview. The depth of focus for the environmental factors affecting the development of alternatives may vary depending upon the actual corridor that is being studied. No alternative will be selected as the recommended alternative if it is believed that there are significant social, economic, and/or environmental factors that would preclude an alternative from ever becoming a preferred alternative through a formal NEPA process.

To provide consistency in the transportation planning process between the affected agencies, a cooperative agreement will be established through a memorandum of understanding (MOU) for the EOS. This will allow local agency or developer-funded projects a basis for making needed transportation improvements or for making other improvements in a manner such that future transportation improvements are not precluded. It is recognized that for any future improvements that require federal funds, additional analysis and documentation will be required. This additional analysis would build on the EOS evaluation, minimizing the risk of future changes to the EOS findings.



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List of Acronyms

A

ACP – Access Control Plan
ADT – Average Daily Traffic
AMI – Area Median Income

B

BRT – Bus Rapid Transit

C

CBG – Census Block Group
CDOT – Colorado Department of Transportation
CDOW – Colorado Division of Wildlife
CDPHE – Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment
CO – Carbon Monoxide
CPA – Cooperative Planning Area

D

dBA – A weighted measure of decibels
DOI – U.S. Department of Interior
DOLA – Department of Local Affairs

E

EA – Environmental Assessment
EIS – Environmental Impact Statement
EOS – Environmental Overview Study
EPA – Environmental Protection Agency

F

FEMA – Federal Emergency Management Agency
FHWA – Federal Highway Administration

G

GIS – Geographic Information Systems
GMA – Growth Management Area

H

HOV – High-Occupancy Vehicle

I

I – Interstate
IGA – Intergovernmental Agreement

L

LCR – Larimer County Road
LOS – Level of Service
LUST – Leaking Underground Storage Tank
LWCF – Land and Water Conservation Fund

M

MCP – Multi-County Places
MOU – Memorandum of Understanding
MS4 – Municipal Separate Storm Sewer System
MSAT – Mobile Source Air Toxin
MVMT – Million Vehicle Miles Traveled

N

NAAQS – National Ambient Air Quality Standards
NAC – Noise Abatement Criteria
NB – Northbound
NEPA – National Environmental Policy Act
NFRMPO – North Front Range Metropolitan Planning Organization



NFRT&AQPC – North Front Range
Transportation & Air Quality Planning
Council

NHPA – National Historic Preservation Act

NPS – National Park Service

NRHP – National Register of Historic
Places

NWI – National Wetland Inventory

Q

OAHP – Office of Archaeology and
Historic Preservation

R

ROW – Right of Way

RTP – Regional Transportation Plan

S

SB – Southbound

SFCSD – South Fort Collins Sanitation
District

SH – State Highway

SHPO – State Historic Preservation Officer

T

TDM – Transportation Demand
Management

TNM – FHWA’s Traffic Noise Model
Version 2.5

TSM – Transportation Systems
Management

U

UPRR – Union Pacific Railroad

US – United States Highway

USACE – United States Army Corps of
Engineers

USC – United States Code

USDOT – United State Department of
Transportation

USFWS – United States Fish and Wildlife
Service

USGS – United States Geological Survey

UST – Underground Storage Tank

V

VMT – Vehicle Miles of Travel

VPD – Vehicles per Day

W

WCR – Weld County Road

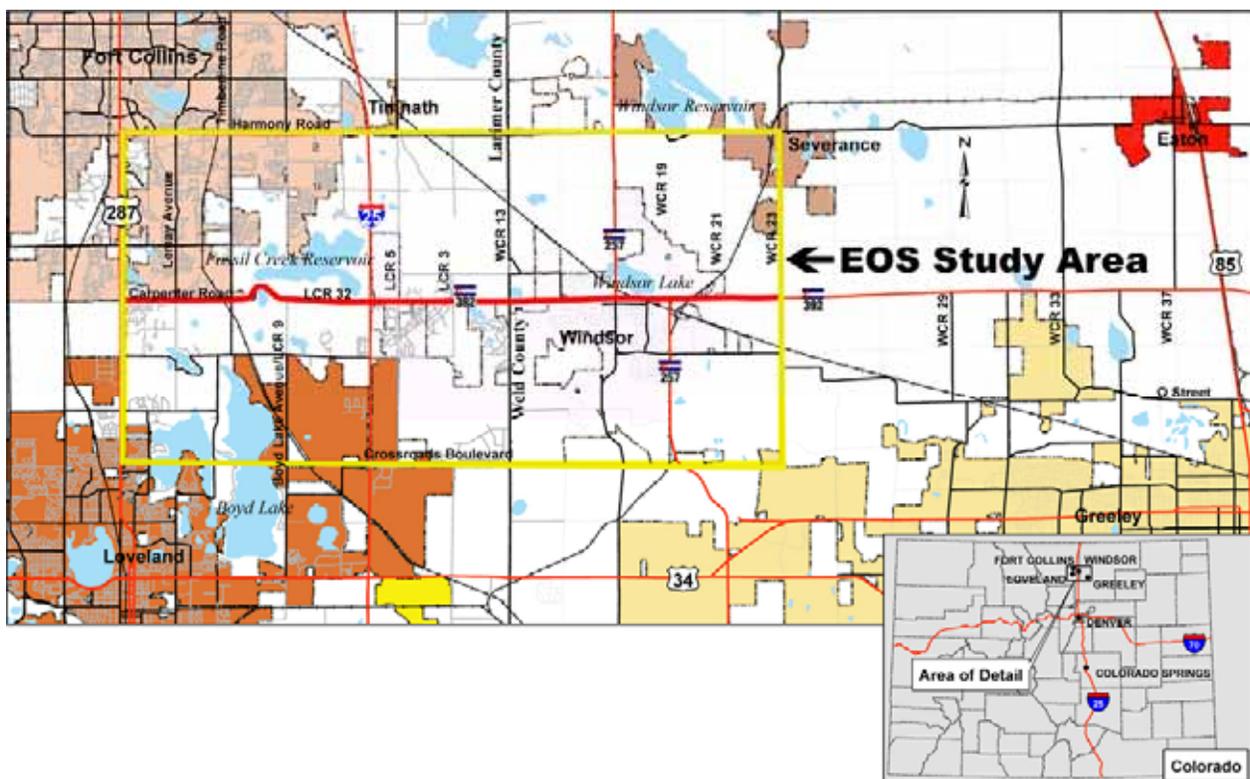


EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction and Project Scope

Population and employment in Northern Colorado and near the Town of Windsor in particular have been growing rapidly in recent years, and land development has been occurring at a very high pace. This growth has a dramatic affect on traffic and congestion. Existing daily traffic volumes on SH 392 in and near Windsor range from approximately 20,000 vehicles per day (vpd) in the I-25 interchange area to approximately 9,000 vpd at each end of the corridor, substantially exceeding the capacity of this two-lane roadway. Projected daily traffic volumes in 2030 are double, and in some cases triple, the existing volumes. If no improvements are made to the highway, nearly the entire study area will be congested and operating at a failing level of service. As the development driving this growth in traffic conditions along State Highway (SH) 392 continues, it has become a critical need to preserve corridor right of way (ROW) so that the opportunity to accommodate future improvements without costly purchase of developed land will not be lost. The Colorado Department of Transportation (CDOT) conducted the SH 392 Environmental Overview Study (EOS) from US 287 to SH 257 South to identify potential future transportation solutions and provide local planners with guidance on what ROW reservations and dedications should be sought from developers.

Study Area





CDOT Region 4's EOS process is similar to the environmental studies required by the National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA) when Federal funds are being used for transportation improvements. However, the EOS process is less detailed and has a lower level of involvement by Federal and state regulatory and resource agencies than would be necessary to select a definitive preferred alternative for environmental approval. The objective of the EOS was to be similar to a future NEPA study. However, the EOS does not take the place of a NEPA study, and at such time that Federal funds are desired to be used to advance improvements to the corridor, a study complying with NEPA will still need to be conducted. The EOS approach was necessary for this study because no funding existed on the *North Front Range Metropolitan Organization's (NFRMPO) 2030 Transportation Plan (2004)*, which is a prerequisite for the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) to issue a decision document on a NEPA study. CDOT Region 4 proactively developed the EOS as an alternative study process that could precede NEPA, engage local communities and agencies, and serve as a planning document for corridor preservation.

Corridor Identification

SH 392 is a regional roadway that provides access from Windsor to I-25 and the cities of Loveland, Fort Collins, and Greeley. It also provides regional mobility for commuting and commerce between Loveland/Fort Collins and Greeley. The SH 392 EOS studied the transportation needs on the corridor between US 287 and SH 257 South. At the time of the study, the section from US 287 to I-25 consisted of Carpenter Road and Larimer County Road (LCR) 32, which was in the midst of a jurisdictional transfer from the City of Fort Collins and Larimer County, respectively, to CDOT to become SH 392.

The project need is based on projected traffic and unacceptable levels of service (LOS) expected by the year 2030. Traffic volumes on the corridor are forecasted to double or triple in that timeframe, with LOS consistently falling in the LOS F range. The study purpose is to investigate potential solutions to regional mobility needs in 2030, by taking an environmentally responsible approach to ensure that transportation needs are being balanced with potential environmental effects. The project's logical termini was established at US 287 on the west and SH 257 South on the east. The study limits were extended easterly to WCR 23 in order to accommodate the investigation of alternative alignments around the Town of Windsor.

Project Context

To understand the project context, the existing transportation system was evaluated, and all applicable environmental resources were inventoried. The resources found to be the most salient to the study and its findings were numerous open spaces and natural areas, wetlands, historic and potentially historic sites, and development pressures.

Alternatives Development and Screening

Alternatives considered in the study consisted of the No-Action Alternative and various action alternatives, including improvements to the existing roadway and several alternative routes, plus examination of non-highway alternatives such as transit, bicycles, and pedestrians. Projected travel demand in 2030 indicates that four lanes will be necessary to carry the expected traffic at



acceptable levels of service (LOS). The EOS studied the potential options of where these four lanes should be located. In addition to investigating improvements to the existing roadway, a regional approach was taken to study alternatives north and south of the existing SH 392 alignment.

Alternatives were investigated in two locations – to relocate SH 392 south of Duck Lake to permit connection of natural areas there with those at Fossil Creek Reservoir, and to bypass the Town of Windsor. The study evaluated three alternatives south of Duck Lake, all appearing to have a certain degree of merit, but all containing environmental effects that must be carefully evaluated in an appropriate environmental study before a recommendation to advance one of these alternatives could be considered. While the study initially investigated several possible bypass routes around Windsor, there seemed to be only one viable bypass alternative that could still be implemented in the available rights of way and undeveloped areas, and still serve the travel demand of the area.

An intensive public and agency involvement program was conducted to solicit input and feedback on the study objectives and outcomes. Eight local governmental jurisdictions participated in the study by attending monthly coordination meetings. The study team conducted a three-step environmental screening process to arrive at a recommended solution that balanced transportation needs with environmental effects. Three public open houses were held to disseminate information and gather input from interested individuals about the study process and outcomes.

Recommendations

The study concluded that CDOT needs to continue to focus administrative, planning, operations, and maintenance efforts on the existing SH 392 corridor. The roadway needs to be widened to four lanes to accommodate the travel demand expected to be placed on it in 2030. Through downtown Windsor, this will require the elimination of parking and restriping to create four lanes of traffic.

While there is some interest in pursuing alternatives around Duck Lake and the Town of Windsor, there was not clear support for one alignment over the others. All the alternatives considered at Duck Lake contained potential environmental effects that presented difficulties in selecting them without the benefit of a more rigorous NEPA study.

The alternative alignment around Windsor did not gain the Town's support. At the time of this writing, Windsor was still evaluating its options for alternatives around the Town. This EOS provided the Town many options to consider and identified the issues associated with them, all of which provides the background information necessary for the Town to assess its priorities and to arrive at an eventual decision about whether there is stronger support for an alternative around the Town or widening the existing alignment on Main Street. Until such time that the Town of Windsor takes a definitive position on alternatives in lieu of widening the existing SH 392 through downtown on Main Street, CDOT will pursue improvements on the existing alignment.



If Windsor decides to pursue an alternative around the town, CDOT will partner with the Town to assist in accomplishing that objective.

Next Steps

As a final step in the EOS process, it is expected that the participating agencies will execute a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to document the consensus achieved on the study process and recommendations. With the MOU and this EOS report at hand, local planning departments can conduct their planning efforts knowing the future vision for SH 392. Where appropriate, they may take steps to preserve the corridor by setting aside ROW as development occurs.

At such time that Federal funds are pursued to advance improvements on the Corridor, a NEPA study must be conducted. That study may use the results of this EOS as input to the process, thus streamlining the process and saving resources. Such a study will serve to investigate in more depth the feasibility of alternatives around Duck Lake, and could investigate alternatives around Windsor if the Town desires such a solution. If projects are advanced using private or local funding, NEPA studies may not be required, but it is recommended that a similar study and environmental analysis be conducted in order to ensure that prudent environmental stewardship objectives are met even though not required by Federal regulations. For any improvements that would become part of the State Highway system, CDOT's Environmental Stewardship Guidelines require that a NEPA study be conducted.

An Access Control Plan (ACP) was conducted in parallel with this EOS. At the time of this writing, the ACP Report was being finalized and the Intergovernmental Agreement (IGA) was being prepared. Each of these efforts needs to be completed in order to provide the necessary guidance to CDOT and the local planning agencies as they consider access permits to SH 392.